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The Murdered Banker's White House Connection

By Maxine Cheshire

A year ago today, on Sept. 26, 1979, two officials of a mysterious and now-defunct international banking company went to a lot of trouble to have a friend of Hamilton Jordan's introduce them to President Carter.

The company was the Nugan Hand Bank of Sydney, Australia. The firm no longer exists except in the mountainous files of law enforcement agencies in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Australia, where there are investigations of allegations of murder, mysterious disappearance, misappropriations of millions of dollars, drug trafficking and suspected ties to the CIA.

"It's like a Graham Greene thriller, like 'The Third Man,' says one observer. "The mystery may never be solved."

The central figure who wanted so much to meet Carter was Frank Nugan, the 35-year-old Australian-born chairman of the worldwide merchant banking operation which collapsed within weeks after he was found shot dead last January in his Mercedes Benz on a lonely road outside Sydney.

The occasion last September was the Democratic National Committee's annual \$1,000-per-plate fund-raiser.

The man at the dinner with Nugan was retired Adm. Earl Yates, who sources say ran the Washington office of Nugan Hand from a K Street office from February 1977 to October 1979. Admiral Yates said he ceased to function as head of the office in July and formally resigned Oct. 12.

The go-between who arranged for Nugan and Yates to sit at a good table, shake hands with the president and have their picture taken with him was John Golden, the college roommate and favorite partying companion of Hamilton Jordan.

Golden, a former deputy treasurer at the DNC, in charge of soliciting corporate contributions, had just opened his own consulting firm here.

According to Yates, it was Nugan who wanted to "see" Carter, but it was illegal for him to buy a ticket himself, or for Nugan Hand to buy it. Yates, in a telephone interview this week from his retirement home in Virginia Beach, said he personally bought two \$1,000 tickets through Golden and was never reimbursed by Nugan Hand for the expenditure.

"It's illegal for a foreigner to contribute to a fund-raiser," Yates said, "or at least that's my understanding. I didn't want to take any chances."

It would have also been illegal for Nugan Hand as a corporation to buy the tickets.

Someone at Nugan Hand—Yates said he can't remember who it was—suggested making arrangements through Golden "because he was supposed to be a person of some importance" with the Carter administration.

Golden had been identified by a newspaper story the previous week, on Sept. 18, as a close friend of Jordan's who had left the DNC to become a consultant in his own business, The John G. Golden Co.

"Otherwise," Yates said, "at an event like this, you end up back among the rosebushes where you can't see anything."

Golden, according to other sources, put Nugan and Yates at his own table and in his enthusiasm to introduce them to Carter, as the president was making his rounds, spilled a bottle of wine on the table.

Photographers from the DNC and the White House were snapping pictures which were supposed to be made available afterwards on request to the \$1,000-ticket holders.

Although formal orders for a photograph showing President Carter with Golden and Yates and Nugan have been made repeatedly by Nugan Hand executives and Yates himself and the news media, the DNC has never released a print.

Yates confirmed that he and Nugan had another meeting with Golden at

the Four Seasons Hotel in Georgetown where they had drinks and dinner with a group of men whose names Yates says he "doesn't remember."

Yates said that he also "doesn't recall" what was discussed during that dinner or when it took place. But another source who was present has told The Washington Post that Nugan wanted to hire Golden as a consultant who could be useful in the bank's dealing in Panama with Hamilton Jordan's buddy, Gen. Omar Torrijos.

"He [Golden] bragged about Hamilton's connections with Torrijos," the source said. "He said Gen. Torrijos would do anything for Hamilton—they're very, very good friends."

There was a little-known Nugan Hand office in Panama at the time, the source said, although it was not listed in their official brochures with other addresses in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, West Germany, Saudi Arabia and South America.

Yates said that "to my knowledge," Golden was never retained.

The dinner at the Four Seasons, according to another source, took place in late October or early November 1979.

By that time, Nugan Hand was beginning to come apart.

Two months later, on Jan. 27, Nugan was dead under questionable circumstances, with a bullet wound in his head and a rifle beside his body. At the inquest the insurance companies said he couldn't have fired the shot that killed him.

Millions of dollars were found to be missing. His partner, Michael Hand, a former Green Beret, had disappeared and is believed by some to be dead.

The company collapsed into insolvency and the investigations are still going on around the world.

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